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The real Christian's GROWTH in GRACE; and Progress towards PERFECTION.

A

SERMON

ON THE

APOSTLE's PRAYER,

PHILIPPIANS I. 9.—11.

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

OLNEY, *BUCKS*,

IN THE MONTH OF JUNE, 1787.

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PREFACE.

THE publication of this Sermon was occaſioned by the following circumſtance. The Author made a viſit to the neighbourhood, in which he had for many years reſided, as Curate in ſeveral contiguous pariſhes ſucceſſively: And where a people had been brought to profeſs evangelical Truth under his miniſtry. In every ſermon amongſt them, he very particularly exhorted them to walk worthy of that profeſſion; which occaſioned the ſuggeſtion, that it might be expedient for ſomewhat of this kind to be printed, to aſſiſt their memories: and in conſequence this was determined on.

As the ſubſtance of the ſame practical inſtructions, and exhortations had been delivered in different places, and from different texts, yet very much to the ſame people; there were an objection to that being ſelected, which was preached at Olney: An addreſs of this kind could not be ſuppoſed either ſo needful, or ſo proper, if made to thoſe, who formerly profeſſed the Goſpel in that town, and who had been ſo fully inſtructed by the Author's much eſteemed friend, who ſo long miniſtered amongſt them. Altho' he has their welfare alſo much at heart; yet aſſuredly this publication had not at this time appeared, had it not been for the ſake of thoſe,

who

who profeſs to have received their firſt ſerious impreſſions under his miniſtry. But this objection was over-ruled by the conſideration that this text, would give the fulleſt ſcope to the ſubject.

Altho' the form of a Sermon is retained, for the ſake of the perſonal addreſs to them, for whom it was intended; yet 'tis much of the nature of a treatiſe. There is much more in it, than in the Sermon, that was preached; and in ſhort, all that the Author could adduce on the ſubject, and comprize in ſo narrow a compaſs.

He is the more ſatisfied to add this to his other publications, not only as deeply convinced, that it contains important and ſeaſonable truth; but becauſe he now leaves with the people, who formerly did; and lays before thoſe, who now do attend his miniſtry; and before the public (as far as one ſo obſcure in any way engages it's attention) the ſubſtance of his views of Chriſtianity: viz. in the Diſcourſe on Repentance, his late Sermon on the Doctrines of Election, &c. and the preſent Sermon. He only aſks an attentive, and candid peruſal, and to be weighed in the Scripture Ballance: And heartily prays that every reader may be taught of God, to embrace what is Scriptural, and reject the reſt.

Chapel-Street,
Auguſt 15th, 1787.

THOMAS SCOTT.

SERMON

SERMON, &c.

PHILIPPIANS I. 9.—11.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more, and more in knowledge, and in all judgment;
That ye may approve things, that are excellent; that ye may be ſincere, and without offence 'till the day of Chriſt;
Being filled with the fruits of Righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, unto the praiſe, and glory of God.

THE Apoſtle Paul was evidently a perſon of ſtrong paſſions, and quick ſenſibility; and being by divine Grace exceedingly filled with love to Jeſus Chriſt, and to the ſouls of men; his mind was affected with the moſt lively emotions of joy, or ſorrow, hope, or fear, according to the tidings he received from the ſeveral churches of Chriſt. At one time, "he is filled with hea-"vineſs," "has no reſt in his fleſh," "can no "longer forbear:" and "writes out of much af-"fliction, and anguiſh of heart with many tears." At another time, "he is filled with comfort," "is exceeding joyful in all his tribulation;" "Is "comforted in all his afflictions by their faith;"

"for now," ſays he "we live, if ye ſtand faſt "in the Lord."*

He intimates to us, that "theſe were things, "which concerned his infirmities."† And without all doubt this ſanguine diſpoſition, needs much correction and regulation by divine Grace, and requires to be counterbalanced with extraordinary humility, wiſdom, patience, and diſintereſtedneſs. But being thus regulated, as in the caſe of the Apoſtle; it may almoſt be called the *main ſpring* of miniſterial activity; and was greatly ſubſervient to his extraordinary uſefulneſs.——

In this Epiſtle to the Philippians the Apoſtle is animated with a glow of joy, and affection; and ſcarce allows time for the ordinary ſalutation, before he abruptly breaks forth, "I thank my God "upon every remembrance of you." From the abundance of his heart his mouth ſpake: As it did afterwards, when concerning others, he ſays, "for many walk, of whom I have told you often, "and now tell you, even weeping, that they are "the enemies of the croſs of Chriſt; whoſe end is "deſtruction, whoſe God is their belly, whoſe "glory is in their ſhame, who mind earthly "things." § My Brethren there are too many every where, even amongſt profeſſors of the Goſpel, whoſe walk and converſation would conſtrain one of leſs gracious ſenſibility than St. Paul, to weep upon every recollection, or mention of them: But there are others, and many of them preſent, over whom I ſincerely rejoice, and on whoſe account, I ought continually "to thank my God."

* See 1 Theſſ. iii. 8, 10. † 2 Cor. xi. 30.
§ Philip. iii. 18. 19.

Waving

Waving therefore at preſent the too great cauſe for lamentation, which the conduct of numbers in this place and neighbourbood, ſo long favoured with a preached Goſpel, calls for; I would on this occaſion indulge the joyous ſenſation, and chearfully bleſs the Lord, that whilſt ſo many neglect, ſo many abuſe the Salvation of Chriſt, there is a remnant, no inconſiderable number, of another ſpirit.

But tho' the Apoſtle had occaſion thus to thank God on their behalf, he had yet much more to long for reſpecting them; therefore he adds, "always in "every prayer of mine, for you all, making "requeſt with joy." The particular requeſts thus conſtantly preſented for them, he enumerates in the words of my text: And as they ſo exactly correſpond with the beſt deſires of my heart for you, my Brethren, I have choſen them, as the ſubject of this my occaſional addreſs to you, who, many of you, once ſtatedly attended on my miniſtry.

In diſcourſing upon them, I ſhall

I. Conſider the characters of the perſons, for whom theſe requeſts were made.

II. Make ſome general obſervations on this prayer, as it ſtands connected with other parts of this Epiſtle, and with other Scriptures.

III. Explain, and illuſtrate the ſeveral petitions contained in it. And

IV. Enquire into the reaſons, which, we may ſuppoſe, induced the Apoſtle thus to pray, in behalf of his beloved Philippians.

And may the Lord proſper the attempt, and teach us all thus to pray from the heart for ourſelves, for each other, and for all, "who love the "Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity:" and may the

prayer be anſwered in its fulleſt meaning to every one of us, that we may live and die in the ſpirit, and comfort of it.

I. Let us conſider the character of the perſons, for whom theſe requeſts were made. As in preaching it is neceſſary, that the hearers be addreſſed according to their different characters, and ſituations, that the word of truth may not only be faithfully ſpoken, but rightly divided; and as the portion, which exactly ſuits one perſon, may be utterly unſuitable to another: So muſt our ſupplications in behalf of others, have reſpect to their characters, and circumſtances, and be varied accordingly. Had the Apoſtle been praying for profane and careleſs perſons, for hypocritical abuſers, or phariſaical contemners of the Goſpel, he had certainly offered very different requeſts: In behalf of the ignorant enquirer, the broken hearted mourner for ſin, the wavering, or backſliding profeſſor, he would ſtill have varied his ſupplications. But they were not perſons of evil, or doubtful characters, but chriſtians, confirmed chriſtians, evidently, and eminently ſo, tho' of no long ſtanding in the Church of Chriſt, for whom theſe petitions were preſented. The Apoſtle rejoices in, "and is thankful for their fellowſhip in the Goſpel, from the "firſt day until now." He is, "confident, that "he who hath begun a good work in them, will "perform it until the day of Chriſt:" he conſiders it, "as meet that he ſhould think thus of *them* "*all*," on account of the good fruit, they had already produced. It is implied in the prayer itſelf, that they already "abounded in love:" he mentions afterwards, that they had "always obeyed, not as in his preſence only, but now much "more

" more in his abſence:" and he concludes the Epiſtle, with recording the fruits of their faith and love, which they had heretofore, and more recently produced, and whereby they had diſtinguiſhed themſelves from the other Churches of Macedonia.*

It is therefore evident that the practical nature of this prayer, is not to be conſidered as interfering with any of the doctrines of Grace. The perſons, for whom it was preſented, " being already juſtified " by faith, had peace with God, thro' our Lord " Jeſus Chriſt;" " in whom they had Redemption " thro' his blood, even the forgiveneſs of their ſins, " according to the riches of his Grace:" " The " Lord had ſaved them, and called them with an " holy calling, not according to their own works, " but according to his own purpoſe and grace, " given them in Chriſt Jeſus before the world " began;" and they " were now kept by the " mighty power of God, thro' faith unto Sal- " vation."

On theſe ſubjects we are not at preſent to diſcourſe: but conſidering theſe truths, and others connected with them, as already proved, and fully believed amongſt us; we are now to enquire what manner of perſons they are, who have obtained this precious faith, and are intereſted in all theſe excellent privileges; and what further they are to aſpire after, and preſs forward to.

With heart-felt ſatisfaction I would expreſs my confidence, that many preſent both count the doctrine of God our Saviour, all their hope and joy, and would willingly be inſtructed how to adorn

* Philip. iv. 10, 15, 18, 19.

this

this doctrine in all things. But I fear there are thoſe, who are otherwiſe minded: I would juſt premiſe, that my addreſs at preſent is peculiarly to thoſe of the former, not of the latter character. And proceed

II. To make ſome general obſervations on this prayer, as it ſtands connected with other parts of this Epiſtle, and with other Scriptures.

1. I obſerve, that thereby the Apoſtle eſtabliſhes this Truth, that "all holy deſires, all good coun-"ſels, and all juſt works" are from God; as our Liturgy well expreſſes it: or in the ſtill more emphatical language of inſpiration, that "every "good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, "and cometh down from the Father of Lights." Indeed all prayer, for wiſdom, holineſs, and ability to perform good works, evidently implies this doctrine; and ſuppoſes that Communications from the fountain of wiſdom, and holineſs are neceſſary in order to our being wiſe, and holy; that ſuch communications are warrantably expected, and ought to be earneſtly deſired by us; and it is our duty, and privilege to apply for, and depend on them, in every thing we undertake.

YES, my Brethren, if any of our fallen race have ever been wiſe, and holy, it hath not only been by communications from the Father of Lights; but by the influences of the *holy Spirit*, as thro' Chriſt Jeſus, and his Mediation, given unto, and dwelling in his people; "by the ſupply of the Spirit of "Jeſus Chriſt." "From his fulneſs have they "all received:" that fulneſs ſtill continues undiminiſhed: from him all Believers have received, and are receiving continually: and would we emulate their excellent endowments, imitate their bright examples,

examples, or aſpire to their uſefulneſs, who thro' faith have obtained a good report; the way is marked out in the word of God; "He that abideth "in me," ſaith Jeſus Chriſt, "and I in him bring-"eth forth *much fruit*; for without me, ye can "do nothing." Let us then ſtir up ourſelves, and each other, to vigorous exerciſes of faith and prayer; let us "aſk and receive, that our joy may be "full!"

2. I obſerve that the Apoſtle judged this doctrine of divine influences to be perfectly conſiſtent with the uſe of exhortations and perſuaſions to the very ſame things, which had been the matter of his prayers for them. Thus in this ſame Epiſtle, he ſays,* "only let your converſation be as it "becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt, that whether I "come, and ſee you, or elſe be abſent, I may "hear of your affairs, that ye ſtand faſt in one "ſpirit, with one mind, ſtriving together for the "faith of the Goſpel.'—† "If there be any con-"ſolation in Chriſt, if any comfort of love, if any "fellowſhip of the ſpirit, if any bowels and mercies, "fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having "the ſame love, being of one accord, of one mind. "Let nothing be done thro' ſtrife and vain glory, "but in lowlineſs of mind, let each eſteem other "better than themſelves.—Look not every man "on his own things, but every man alſo on the "things of others. Let that mind be in you, "which was alſo in Chriſt Jeſus."‡ Wherefore, "my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as "in my preſence only, but now much more in

* i Chap. 27. † ii Chap. 1; 5. ‡ ii Chap. 12, 16.

"my

" my abſence, work out your own Salvation with " fear, and trembling; for it is God, that worketh " in you, to will, and do, of his good pleaſure: " do all things without murmurings, and diſpu- " tings, that ye may be blameleſs and harmleſs, the " ſons of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a " crooked and perverſe nation, among whom ye " ſhine, as lights in the world; holding forth the " word of life." And to add but one more citation; " * Finally Brethren whatſoever things are true, " whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things " are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, what- " ſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are " of good report, if there be any virtue, if " there be any praiſe, think on theſe things; thoſe " things which ye have both learned, and re- " ceived, and heard, and ſeen in me, do, and the " God of Peace ſhall be with you." Every Perſon, who, with any degree of attention, reads the other Epiſtles of St. Paul, and indeed any part of the Scripture, muſt ſee that it is every where full of ſuch exhortations to all kinds of perſons.

'Tis frequently cauſe of admiration with many perſons that men cannot find the doctrines of Grace in the ſacred Scriptures: and indeed they do ſeem written therein as with a Sun-beam. But is it not equally admirable that any, who appear in other things greatly to reverence, and carefully to examine the ſcriptures; yet overlook all theſe exhortations, perſuaſions, and admonitions, as if they had never been written, or we had nothing to do with them? Surely they are as ſtrongly marked in, and as cer-

* iv Chap. 8, 9.

tainly

tainly form a part of the word of God, as the other.* The pretended mother was willing the child ſhould be divided, tho' thereby deſtroyed: but the true mother would not conſent, becauſe of the unfeigned affection ſhe bare it. Much allowance muſt be indeed made for variety of prejudices, where the heart appears upright: But where people are thus diſpoſed to divide the ſacred Scriptures, there is too much reaſon to ſuſpect the ſincerity of their profeſſed love for them. He, who can cordially ſay, "thy word is very pure, therefore thy Servant "loveth it," like the true mother, will not conſent to ſuch mutilation; every part is very pure, all is needful, and uſeful, all "does good to him, who "walketh uprightly;" therefore he loves the whole.

INDEED every part, properly underſtood, occupies it's place in one harmonious whole, and is eaſily reconciled by a candid, and teachable mind. The commandment, ſhews us what we ought to be, and do; what we are, and what we want: The doctrine ſhews us where our wants may be ſupplied, and our miſeries redreſſed: The threatnings warn us to flee from the wrath to come; the invitations and promiſes draw us to Jeſus and the throne of Grace: the exhortations ſtir us up to attempt obedience; our failures ſhew the preciouſneſs of the promiſes, and put life into our prayers; and thus, incapable of doing any thing of ourſelves, "we can do all things thro' Chriſt, "who ſtrengthens us." Thus when God by his preventing Grace hath wrought in us a willing mind, every part of Scripture becomes

* 1 Kings. iii. 26.

uſeful; and yet 'tis God alone, who enables us to perform his holy Will.

3. I obſerve that the Apoſtle offers theſe prayers for perſons, about whoſe converſion he was fully ſatisfied, and of whoſe final perſeverance he was confident. "Being confident of this very thing, "that he, who hath begun a good work in you, "will perform the ſame until the day of Jeſus "Chriſt; even as it is meet for me to think "this of you all." *

HENCE I infer that there is ſomething more in Chriſtianity deſirable, and attainable, than merely the final Salvation of our own ſouls. The Salvation of one ſoul is an object of that magnitude, that no temporal intereſt is worthy to ſtand in competition with it. But the glory of God in the credit and ſpread of the Goſpel, and the everlaſting intereſts of multitudes, as connected therewith, is of ſtill greater importance, beyond compariſon, yea infinitely. That ſelfiſhneſs, which is natural to man, yields not to any ſyſtem of doctrine, as notionally received: But the ſpirit of Chriſt produces the mind, that was in Chriſt: Love ſeeketh not it's own; and true Grace expands the heart, influences to a comparative diſregard of ourſelves, and renders us zealous for the glory of God, and deſirous of the Salvation of others.

THE Law of God written in the heart is the evidence that our iniquities are all forgiven: This Law comprizes ſupreme love to God, and love of our neighbour as ourſelves. Now if any man can ſatisfy himſelf with the hope of Heaven, without any regard in his conduct to the glory of God, and the ſalvation of men; he is as evidently ſel-

* 1 Chap. 6, 7.

fiſh,

fiſh, and deſtitute of the Law of God written in the heart, as the man, who ſatisfied with living in abundance himſelf, regards not how many are pinched with want, even thro' his oppreſſion; and has no more real Chriſtianity than he. My Brethren, I have long, and I hope not unſucceſsfully been inculcating amongſt you, a generous regard for the credit of the Goſpel, and the ſalvation of others; and would now "ſtir up your pure minds by way of "remembrance;" that "your light may ſhine ſtill "more, and more before men, that they may ſee "more evidently your good works, and join with "you in glorifying your heavenly Father." This laſt obſervation will inform you of the leading intention of this diſcourſe. Proceed we therefore

III. To explain and illuſtrate the ſeveral petitions, contained in this prayer

"This I pray that your *Love* may abound yet "more, and more." As the Apoſtle doth not determine the Love, which he ſpeaks of, to any particular object, or exerciſe, therefore I ſhall give the ſubject a large ſcope.——There is nothing, of which ſuch high things are ſpoken in Scripture, as Love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law;" and the tendency of the Goſpel; "Now the end of "the commandment is love, out of a pure heart, "and of a good conſcience, and of faith un-"feigned." The context, as well as the meaning of the original word,* leads us to explain this of the Goſpel Revelation, or Declaration. "Nothing "avails in Chriſt but faith, which worketh by "*Love.*" Love works obedience to God's commandments; and "by love Chriſtians ſerve

* παραγγελιας 1 Tim. i. 5.

" one another." " Love is of God, and every one " that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God; " he that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God " is Love." " He that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth " in God, and God in him." And " now abideth " faith, hope, and love, but the greateſt of theſe " is LOVE," without which every other attainment is utterly worthleſs. For tho' faith alone juſtifies, being the only *recipient* from Jeſus Chriſt, in, and from whom is our righteouſneſs; and tho' hope be the anchor of the ſoul, and the helmet of ſalvation: Yet theſe are but the means; Love is the end to be attained by them: Theſe are the ſcaffolding, indiſpenſably neceſſary to the erection of the building, but to be taken down, when the building is compleated. Faith will at length be loſt in viſion, and hope in fruition; but Love ſhall then be perfected, and remain for ever, the very temper, employment, and felicity of Heaven itſelf.

Love is indeed that diſtinguiſhing eſſential of true religion,

Which hypocrites could near attain,
Which falſe Apoſtates never knew.

None of the fallen race of Adam ever were partakers of it, but they, who were born of God: " every one that loveth, is born of God, and " knoweth God."

Love being the leading affection in the human ſoul, and giving the direction to all the reſt, in our preſent diſordered ſtate, is incapable of fixing upon it's proper object, but is proſtituted upon ſuch, as are mean, and baſe. An unholy heart cannot love holineſs: Therefore " the carnal mind " is enmity againſt a holy God; and cannot be " ſubject to an holy Law:"—Some ſemblance of

of gratitude, when our inclinations are gratified, we may diſcover; ſome kind of benevolence towards our fellow creatures. But theſe are not that love here ſpoken of; tho' being purified, and exalted in the true Chriſtian, they rank amongſt it's exercizes. The holy character, law, government, providence, ordinances, and people of God, we naturally diſreliſh, deſpiſe, and even abhor: Eſpecially the humbling truths of the Goſpel, and God's ſovereignty in his free ſalvation of ſinners, are the objects of our proud unholy averſion: tho' therein is contained the grand diſplay of the divine perfections in their full glory and beauty. This ſtate of the heart can only be cured by regeneration: "Ye muſt be born again." Diſcoveries of divine excellency will otherwiſe only excite proportionable enmity: Nor can benefits beſtowed overcome onr averſion to the holineſs of our benefactor: Therefore they, that "that are in the fleſh, cannot "pleaſe God."

But in regeneration, tho' in a manner we cannot comprehend or explain, new ſpiritual perceptions are communicated, and ſpiritual objects, being "ſpiritually diſcerned," excite very different ſenſations; and a conſequent revolution takes place in the judgment and affections: "Old things are paſt away, behold! all things "are become new." Now LOVE the leading affection is divorced from it's former baſe attachments, and gradually learns to eſteem, deſire, reliſh, cleave to, and delight in the ſpiritual excellency of things divine, which before were the objects of it's contempt and averſion. The heart made holy, now loves holy perſons, and holy things.*

* Simile ſimili gaudet.

This new born ſpiritual capacity is in Scripture ſpoken of in figures, borrowed from the bodily ſenſes: The ſoul ſees heavenly beauty in divine things; hears delightful harmony; ſmells fragrancy, as of ointment poured forth; and taſtes ſweetneſs, as of honey and the honey comb.

THESE perceptions in the new born child of God will be feeble and indiſtinct, and often almoſt overborn, and loſt in the tumult of natural paſſions, and the conflict of corruptions: But it will ever lead him to "deſire the ſincere milk of the "word, that he may grow thereby." It is indeed "that little leaven, which will certainly "leaven the whole lump;" and which, gradually diffuſing it's heavenly ſavour, and influence, will in due time ſubordinate and regulate all other affections.

THIS ſpiritual excellency being perceived in the ſcripture repreſentation of the divine character, joined to the conſideration of our relations and obligations to him, produces a conviction of the goodneſs of the divine Law, of the evil of ſin, and of our own *juſt* deſert of puniſhment. Other diſcoveries may terrify and alarm; nothing *ſhort* of this can produce humiliation and ſelf-abhorrence: Tho' further diſcoveries of the glory of God will exceedingly encreaſe them.

FOR if only thus perceived, our view of our own vileneſs in the light of the divine holineſs, and juſtice, would join diſcouragement and even deſpair to our conviction. But when "that God, who "cauſed the light to ſhine out of darkneſs, ſhines "into our heart, to give us the light of the glory "of God, in the face of Jeſus Chriſt;" and we perceive the nature of his ſalvation, in connection with

with the dignity of his perſon: whilſt in his righteouſneſs, atonement, reſurrection, and exaltation; in his mediatory offices, his love, and power, he appears the Saviour we want, and we are encouraged to come to him, and hope in him, under our deepeſt humiliation as guilty polluted ſinners: We there alſo ſee the divine character in ſoftened luſtre, and more winning amiableneſs. There we ſee the divine purity, juſtice, goodneſs, mercy, truth, and wiſdom harmoniouſly diſplayed; whilſt our concern therein adds lovelineſs to the whole. Viewed now without terror, by the newly opened eye of the ſoul, whilſt we adore, and reverence his awful Majeſty, we learn to approve and love his holy excellency, to deſire, chuſe and hope in him as our portion; to fear coming ſhort of this newly apprehended felicity; to delight when we have an encouraging proſpect of it; to feel gratitude for ſuch merciful, and condeſcending regard of this holy glorious God to ſuch vile ſinners; to deſire that all others knew and loved him too, were happy in his favour, and rendered him praiſe; to have zeal for his glory to be grieved when we offend him; to find it good to draw near to him, and to take pleaſure in meditating on him, and in doing his Will. Thus every exerciſe of love to God the Father, and our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as the effect of the ſanctification of the Spirit, ſprings from, or is connected with, this perception of his holy excellency, and amiableneſs: And tho' it excludes not other exerciſes of love; yet nothing can be genuine without it.

THIS ſame principle in the renewed ſoul perceives, and reliſhes the excellency of the holy precepts: The Chriſtian *delights* in the law of God

" after

"after the inward man;" "longs to have his "ways directed to keep God's precepts;" Exclaims "O how I love thy Law!" and "counts "all the Commandments in all things to be right, "and hates every falſe way." 'Tis his love to the excellency of the divine law, and his longing deſire after perfect conformity to it, that renders "the "ſin, which dwelleth in him," the burden, grief, and terror of his ſoul.

The ſame holy excellency perceived in the word of God influences the Chriſtian cordially to love it, "to take it for his delight, and counſellour," and to "meditate therein day and night;" eſteeming the words therefore more than his neceſſary food; "and as a new born babe deſiring the ſincere milk "of the word, that he may grow thereby."

In like manner we learn "to love the habitation "of God's houſe, the place where his honour "dwelleth;" to be glad when 'tis ſaid, "let us go "unto the houſe of the Lord;" "to count one "day in his courts better than a thouſand." Thus his holy day alſo becomes our delight, which once was our wearineſs; "our ſoul is ſatisfied as with "marrow, and fatneſs, whilſt we praiſe the "Lord with joyful lips;" and all his ordinances are loved, longed after, and taken pleaſure in.

We alſo ſee the beauty of the Lord our God upon his people, whom before we deſpiſed; and love in them the image of our beloved; eſteem them "the excellent of the earth, in whom is all our "delight;" "chuſe them for our companions;" join in their joys, ſhare in their ſorrows; value their friendſhip, ſeek their welfare, and pray for their proſperity.

BEHOLDING with admiration and delight "the "glory of the Lord, we are alſo changed into the "ſame image from glory to glory." And thus conformed to him, and imitating his moſt amiable, and excellent example, (as well as loving him, and keeping his commandments;) we learn not only to love Chriſtians, as Brethren in Chriſt; But all others, as Brethren in Adam; neighbours near to us; one fleſh, tho' not one ſpirit with us. Thus Love to the excellency of Chriſt's character, induces Love to ſtrangers, enemies, and perſecutors, with all it's bleſſed fruits, of long ſuffering, meekneſs, forgiveneſs, praying for them, doing good to them, and perſevering in endeavours to overcome evil with good.

THUS Love being the ruling affection, and the ſtrongeſt of all the principles of action in our nature, 'tis eaſy to ſee, how all ſpiritual worſhip, humble ſubmiſſion, and devoted obedience to God; and all righteouſneſs, goodneſs, and truth in our conduct towards Man, muſt ſpring from it's various exerciſes, and encreaſe with it's increaſe.

THIS Love the Apoſtle prays, "may abound "yet more and more" amongſt the Philippians. And in other places he expreſſes himſelf in a ſimilar manner,* "The Lord make you to increaſe, "and abound in Love one towards another, and "towards all men, even as we do towards you; "*to the end*, he may eſtabliſh your hearts un-"blameable in holineſs before God, &c."† "Your "faith groweth exceedingly, and the Love of every "one of you all towards each other aboundeth."

* 1 Theſſ. iii. 12. 13. † 2 Theſſ. i. 8.

Not diſſimilar hereto, is the declaration of Chriſt, "Every branch in me, that beareth fruit, he "purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit."

WITH theſe Scriptures before us, I would lead your attention to, and demand your opinion of, a very prevalent notion; viz. that it is a thing of courſe for "true Chriſtians to leave their firſt love." This expreſſion is never uſed but once in Scripture, that I recollect:* "Nevertheleſs I have ſomething "againſt thee, becauſe thou haſt left thy *firſt love:* "Remember therefore from whence thou art "fallen, and repent, and do thy firſt works, elſe "I will come unto thee quickly, and I will remove "thy candleſtick out of his place, except thou "repent." The ſevere rebuke, the ſerious exhortation, and the ſolemn warning of this paſſage, ſeem not very encouraging to ſuch declenſions.—We read alſo that the ſtony ground hearers loſt all their affection, and all their religion together, "becauſe they had no root in themſelves;" which gives this notion no more countenance.

AND ſure nothing can be ſo abſurd, as to ſuppoſe that a Chriſtian, when *growing in Grace*, can decline in that very thing, wherein true Grace principally conſiſts: "for the *greateſt* of theſe "is Love." And doubtleſs the notion is of moſt pernicious tendency, both by encouraging hypocrites, who diſgrace the Goſpel they profeſs; and by putting true Chriſtians, when unſtable, and injudicious, off their guard; leading them to yield to lukewarmneſs, as a thing of courſe, and an evidence of maturity; when they ought to be

* Rev. ii. 4, 5.

watching

watching and praying againſt it, and alarmed and humbled for it, as a moſt horrible evil.

THUS Satan, having in a lukewarm age, *in many places*, eſtabliſhed a falſe teſt of experience, prevails in conſequence, in cauſing it to become very generally the caſe. The argument hereby grows more plauſible, and he, who ſays "Bre-"thren theſe things ought not to be ſo," is almoſt deemed to condemn the generation of God's children.

BUT hear the word of Chriſt,* "becauſe thou art "lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will "ſpue thee out of my mouth." It is ſufficient to obſerve that this notion has no foundation in Scripture, but ſtands in direct oppoſition to it. The queſtion is not, whether things are ſo? But whether they ought to be ſo?

THE real thriving Chriſtian, tho' he experience ſeaſons of comparative lukewarmneſs, which he attempts not to excuſe, but on account whereof he is greatly humbled; yet increaſes in Love continually, and manifeſts it in his whole conduct. Indeed to pray "that your Love may abound "yet more and more," is only to pray that your ſouls may proſper, your grace may increaſe, and that you grow more holy in heart, and life. They mutually imply each other.

LET us well mark the expreſſions: That "your "Love may *abound*;" "may abound *more*," "may abound *yet* more;" "may abound yet "*more, and more.*" "Preſs forwards" is the Chriſtian's Motto, and the Miniſter's watch-word, "We beſeech you therefore, Brethren, and exhort

* Rev. ii. 16.

" you by the Lord Jeſus; that as ye have received " of us, how you ought to walk, and to pleaſe " God, ſo you would abound more and more." The living Chriſtian never in this life is ſatisfied with his preſent meaſure of holineſs; nor can the true Miniſter ever think his beloved people to have arrived at the ſummit of improvement. I bleſs God, " you abound in Love;" I pray God " you may " abound yet more and more;" muſt ſtill be his language.

But the Apoſtle adds, " in knowledge, and in " all judgment." The word rendered judgment is taken from the bodily ſenſes, and uſed figuratively for that ſpiritual perception, before diſcourſed of, and tends to confirm what hath been already advanced. The ſame Apoſtle has in another place a ſimilar expreſſion,* " who by reaſon of uſe have " their *ſenſes* exerciſed to diſcern both good, and " evil." But as this ſpiritual perception, by which the ſoul diſtinguiſhes objects, " as the ear trieth " ſounds, and the mouth taſteth meats," is equivalent to the exerciſe of the renewed judgment about ſpiritual things, I ſhall take the words, as they ſtand in our tranſlation. The explanation of them will diſcover an abatement of affection, which true Chriſtians actually experience.

There may be very ſtrong affections without any implantation of holy principles in the ſoul. Surprize excited by extraordinary objects, or unexpected events: Expectations of things great and glorious, haſtily formed: Gratitude and joy on account of great deliverances real, or ſuppoſed: Sudden tranſitions from ſorrow to gladneſs, from

* Heb. v. 14.

diſma

diſmay to ſecurity, or from pain to pleaſure; what ever excites ſelf-admiration, or confidence, involve, or occaſion a variety of ſtrong affections; juſt the ſame in the concerns of religion, as in the common affairs of life. Thus Iſrael on the banks of the Red-Sea, unexpectedly delivered, and witneſſing the ruin of their formidable enemies, "believed the word of the Lord, and ſang his "praiſe." Godly, and ungodly were all exceedingly affected, and ſeemed in an excellent frame: But it only laſted with the moſt of them, 'till they were croſſed; "they ſoon forgat his works, and would "not abide his counſel." There is nothing in all this likely to continue, or much worth preſerving: If a man have nothing better, "he has "no root in himſelf, and in time of temptation "will fall away."

In the new convert there is alſo much of this: In making the Chriſtian, the nature of the man is not deſtroyed; and theſe are mere natural affections: tho' in the infant feebleneſs of the divine life, they have their uſe, and aſſiſt in producing the neceſſary earneſtneſs. But along with this there is ſomething nobler, and ſupernatural; a ſpark of divine Love, which increaſes when the other ſubſides, and glows from under it's almoſt expiring aſhes. As this heaven-born principle gatners ſtrength, and gains aſcendancy, it ſuffices to excite activity, and gradually regulates, and ſubordinates all natural principles. Thoſe affections, therefore, which have not their root in knowledge, nor their exerciſe in judgment and diſcretion, are no longer neceſſary, and may abate without any injury to the poſſeſſor.

But *ſpiritual* affections ſpring from, and increaſe with ſpiritual illumination, and genuine experience. As the Chriſtian therefore, under the teaching of the Word and Spirit of God, obtains fuller diſcoveries, and has larger acquaintance with the real nature of divine things, he will perceive more of their excellency. In increaſing experience he will more taſte their ſweetneſs, and feel their energy. Each way "his Love will be more and "more" the reſult of knowledge, contemplative, and experimental. Gradually he will know more diſtinctly the reaſon he has to love the Lord, his truths, his precepts, his people: He will be more ſenſible of the cauſe he has to thirſt after, to delight in, and to be thankful to "God his "Saviour:" Zeal for his glory, attachment to his cauſe, ſubmiſſion to his will, and devotedneſs to his ſervice, now appear to his enlightened mind more reaſonable, excellent, and deſirable, than before. He underſtands more diſtinctly, wherefore he, "who loves God, ſhould love his Brother "alſo." He acquires, with progreſſive illumination, a clearer apprehenſion of the nature, and operations of divine Love; and values not ſtrong emotions of the animal ſpirits, producing pleaſing but tranſient ſenſations; in compariſon of that ſteady affection, which habitually induces to an uniform obedience to God's commandments, and imitation of his example: Or of that Love to man, which diſpoſes to "do good unto all men, eſpeci-"ally unto them, that are are of the houſhold of "faith." And he learns to judge of the ſincerity, and degree of his Love, by it's energy in prevailing upon him to renounce, venture, and endure in the ſervice of his Lord: knowing that "this is the

"Love

"Love of God, that we keep his command-
"ments; and his Commandments are not
"grievous."

THUS the Chriſtian may actually "abound more "and more in Love," as it ariſes from "*know-*"*ledge*;" at the very time when ignorant and ſelfiſh affections are ſubſided. That is, his affection grows more noble, and pure; and tho' the livelineſs of his ſenſations be abated, the energy of his Love is increaſed, and the fruits of it more abundant, and beneficial.

As this Love ſprings from knowledge, and increaſes with it; ſo it is exerciſed "in all judg-"ment." The Zeal, which ſprings from ignorant affection, "that Zeal for God, which is not accord-"ing to knowledge," generally waſtes it's vigour in things uſeleſs, or hurtful: 'Tis frequently tarniſhed with pride and bitterneſs; cauſes men to forget their place, character, and relative duties; is moſt eager about things comparatively trivial; and employs imprudent, and unwarrantable means, which excite prejudices, and oft diſhonour the Goſpel. But, if the heart be upright, repeated miſtakes will abate ſelf-confidence, and reiterated diſappointments will teach prudence and caution: And if the Chriſtian really grows in Grace, he will learn experience, wiſdom, and dependance upon God; he will diſcover what befits his place, and duty; he will diſtinguiſh betwixt what is deſirable, and what practicable; will watch the openings of providence; and confine himſelf, to ſcriptural and warrantable means.

THUS raſhneſs, forwardneſs, and oſtentation being brought under, tho' his Love be increaſed, yet the exerciſe of it will fall leſs under obſervation.

Directed

Directed by "Wiſdom, from above, which is "firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be "intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without "*partiality*, and without hypocriſy;" he will adopt leſs exceptionable, and more effectual methods, of expreſſing his zeal. Inſtead of warm, and often angry diſputes about religion, with thoſe, who are ignorant of it, or prejudiced againſt it; he will attempt to win them by the ſilent preaching of a blameleſs, and harmleſs life, by an attention to relative duties, by a meek and quiet deportment, by integrity and ſincerity in word and deed, and by a perſevering endeavour to make every one eaſy, and happy around him. His abounding Love will expreſs itſelf in more frequent and fervent prayers for others, which form a ſecret, but very effectual method of doing good. He will improve the influence, which he already poſſeſſes in his family and connections, and will by conſiſtency of conduct be daily increaſing his Influence. And thus improving his preſent talents, he will wait 'till the providence of God affords him other opportunities of uſefulneſs, which he will gladly embrace.

It is not enough that this, or that is a good work; but a ſound judgment, and quick ſpiritual diſcernment, will determine, whether it be the work *I am* called to perform. For in a great houſe, there are many ſervants, and it is not enough that every ſervant is doing ſomething for their common Maſter; but every one muſt do the work of his own place, or there will be endleſs confuſion and diſturbance; much will be left undone, and much ill done. "The Son of Man "is as a man taking a far journey, who left his "houſe

"houſe, and gave authority to his ſervants, and to "*every man his work.*" Now if every one mind his own buſineſs, all will be done, and well done.

TRUE ſpiritual judgment therefore much conſiſts in underſtanding our proper place and work, in knowing and doing our duty, "in that ſtation "of life, unto which it hath pleaſed God to call "us:" And that Love eſpecially is excellent, which is thus exerciſed "in *all* judgment." "I "ceaſe not to pray for you, that ye might be filled "with the knowledge *of his will in all wiſdom,* "*and ſpiritual underſtanding:* That ye might "walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well pleaſing, "being fruitful in every good work, and increaſing "in the knowledge of God, &c.*

FURTHERMORE a want of judgment in the exerciſe of Love, often produces a diſproportionate zeal, and earneſtneſs: Attention to one part of Chriſtianity ſwallows up the regard due to another. Thus Love to the ordinances of God, and the company of godly people, frequently produces neglect of families, of neceſſary worldly buſineſs, and relative duties, ſo that the word of God is blaſphemed thereby. And as one duty joſtles out another, ſo doth one grace another: Boldneſs excludes meekneſs, and prudence; meekneſs and prudence degenerate into *timidity*: and many ſuch things are common, and cauſe religion to appear as a miſhapen monſter, inſtead of a comely figure. This is rectified, when "Love abounds in "knowledge, and in all judgment." Every duty is then attended to, every grace cultivated, and

* Col. i. 9, 10.

the Chriſtian learns, * "giving diligence, to add "to his faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, "and to knowledge, temperance, and to tempe- "rance, patience, and to patience, godlineſs, and "to godlineſs, brotherly kindneſs, and to bro- "therly kindneſs, charity." Thus exceſſes being corrected, deficiencies ſupplied, every natural propenſity regulated, and apparently oppoſite graces coaleſcing, his religion appears lovely; and he "adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour in all "things."

THE fervent affections of a young Convert may be compared to a fire of thorns, which furiouſly blazes, and crackles; but communicates little heat, performs little, and is ſpeedily extinct: But that "Love, which abounds yet more, and more "in knowledge, and in all judgment," is like the ſteady heat of ſubſtantial fuel, which ſilently produces powerful effects, and is durable in producing them.

ALLOW me to make uſe of another illuſtration. Suppoſe an unconverted man, after having been ſhipwrecked, ſhould be ſurprizingly delivered. He would doubtleſs experience a variety of conflicting paſſions, and manifeſt very ſtrong affections, as joy, and perhaps natural gratitude, which however would produce no abiding change in his conduct. Should this man after ſome years be converted: under the influence of divine Grace he perhaps never would attain ſuch quick ſenſations, and high affections, as upon his firſt deliverance. But now, underſtanding very differently the nature, degree, and author of this mercy; his affection, tho' leſs

* 2 Peter i. 5, 7.

turbulent,

turbulent, would be more rational; and his love, and gratitude for his deliverance would powerfully influence his future conduct.

In fine, lively affections, without knowledge and judgment, betray the poſſeſſors into enthuſiaſtical, and abſurd ſentiments, and unwarrantable practices, which injure them, miſlead others, and diſgrace the Goſpel. On the other hand, knowledge, and judgment, without fervent Love and affection, puff up the poſſeſſor, and like a ſtagnated pool, he becomes uſeleſs, and hurtful. But the bleſſed union of both in one perſon, forms the brighteſt, and moſt uſeful character upon earth; which perhaps was realized in the life, labours, and ſufferings of the Apoſtle himſelf, more than in any other mere man. In theſe things he followed Chriſt, as near as poſſible, and prayed that the Chriſtians, he wrote to, might follow him. Nor can we well conceive any other, or ſuperior kind of growth in Grace, or any thing on earth more divinely excellent. "Brethren, we have not yet ap-"prehended" in this matter, "let us then mind "this one thing; forgetting thoſe things, which "are behind; and reaching forth unto thoſe things, "which are before, let us preſs towards the mark, "for the prize of our high calling of God in "Chriſt Jeſus."

Having cleared our way in ſo fully diſcuſſing the foregoing ſubject, we need not dwell ſo long on the remaining petitions. From faith apprehending Chriſt for Salvation, and working by Love; and thus introducing the ſoul into an experimental acquaintance with the nature, and excellency of ſpiritual things, reſults that ſpiritual diſcernment of, and love to them, before ſpoken of; the

progreſs whereof towards perfection, ſeems to be intended by the Apoſtle in the next clauſe; "That "ye may approve things, that are excellent;" which, I ſuppoſe to imply,

1. THE goodneſs of the diſtinguiſhing faculty. It is here ſuppoſed that there is an inherent excellency in ſome things, previous to our diſcerning it. It hath been ſhewn, that the capacity of perceiving, and delighting in this excellency, is the peculiar effect of regeneration. But, like the capacities we receive from nature, it is capable of being retarded in it's operations; it may remain obtuſe and feeble for want of information; or it may, by ſuitable advantages and inſtructions, be rendered more acute, and exact. God works by means in the kingdom of Grace, as well as in that of nature: And the child of God needs, and is improved by, and in proportion to education, even as the children of men are: Nay their ſpiritual capacities ſeem in themſelves to differ in manner, and degree, as their natural capacities do. But as a man of inferior talents well cultivated by education, will in many things have the advantage over one of ſuperior, but uncultivated abilities; ſo experience proves it to be in the Church of Chriſt. Every one muſt allow, that, tho' every regenerate perſon has this ſpiritual perception, yet 'tis immenſely diſproportionate in ſome, to what it is in others.

NEXT to an honeſt heart, and active love, the acuteneſs, and exactneſs of this diſtinguiſhing faculty ſeems of the greateſt importance to a comfortable, conſiſtent and uſeful life. "Satan can "transform himſelf into an angel of light: His "Miniſters are transformed into Miniſters of "righ-

"righteouſneſs." Even good men are of ſo many different ſentiments in every part of religion, and are often ſo poſitive in, and zealous for them, that controverſies are multiplied, and agitated with unchriſtian pertinacity. In this ſtate of things, we ſhall meet with objections, and difficulties in all we read and hear; and "we muſt needs go out "of the world" to avoid it.

HENCE the importance of attaining, in a diligent attention to the word, and ſimple dependence on the Spirit of God, to that ſtate deſcribed by the Apoſtle, "That we henceforth be no more "children, toſſed to and fro, and carried about "with every wind of doctrine, by the ſleight of "men, and cunning craftineſs, whereby they lie "in wait to deceive:" That we arrive at that exactneſs, and quickneſs of diſcernment, by which we may be able to digeſt "ſtrong meat, which "is for them, who by reaſon of uſe, have their "ſenſes exerciſed to diſcern both good and evil."

A Chriſtian ſhould be willing to receive information from any man, and be always a learner: but Chriſt hath commanded us to call no man Maſter. Others may point out objects to us, and we ſhould thankfully accept of their help; but we muſt ſee them with our own eyes, or not at all. It anſwers every idea of humility, and teachableneſs, when we candidly attend to, and carefully weigh every ſentiment, which has any reſpectable claim to our conſideration, and examine the arguments, on which it reſts: When we bring it to the touch-ſtone of the word of Truth, and earneſtly pray for the teaching of the Spirit of Truth, reſpecting it: And when at laſt, if we are not convinced, we obſerve the rules of meekneſs, and modeſty

modeſty in our objections to it; and of chriſtian charity in what we ſay, or do, with reference to thoſe, who hold it. To go further is to be the diſciples of men; which, my Brethren, I hope you will never be.

An acquaintance with divine Truth in all it's ſtatements, connections, and dependancies; and a knowledge of the chriſtian temper and conduct in it's ſeveral parts, and relations, with reference to all the various ſituations, we can be placed in, is an attainment of great importance, and of great difficulty: Nor can any tolerable proficiency be made in it, but by the diligent attention, and application of the mind for a long time. Yet without ſome good meaſure of this, how ſhall we diſtinguiſh between the precious and the vile? Between truth, and error artfully diſguiſed? Between good, and evil ſpeciouſly propoſed? Between genuine, and counterfeit experience? Between plauſible, and ſolid arguments, or objections?

Without ſomething of this, how ſhall we eſcape the extremes we are prone to run into? How avoid the ſnares Satan lays for us, who tempts not godly people generally to things evidently bad, but deceives them with the ſemblance of good? How be able to avoid being frighted from things excellent by hard names? How from being drawn into error by human authority? In ſhort, how ſhall we ſtear our courſe thro' the ſhoals, and quickſands, which lie in our way, and avoid one rock without ſplitting on another?

Experience too evidently ſhews, that the want of this expoſes numbers to many errors, and miſtakes both in doctrine, and practice; and occaſions an unſteadineſs, and inconſiſtency of character and conduct;

conduct; which, tho' it form no impeachment of a man's ſincerity, yet is very uncomfortable to himſelf, and all around him; robs him of that influence, and conſequent uſefulneſs, to which he would otherwiſe attain; and expoſes religion itſelf to much contempt, and many reproaches. But the capacity of readily, and exactly diſtinguiſhing between things, which differ, enabling a man to "prove all things, and hold faſt, that which is "good," is an attainment of ſuch uſe to ourſelves, and others; and produces ſuch ſteadineſs of character and conduct, that we may well beg of God to beſtow it on thoſe, we love; and ſhould not refuſe to give all diligence to attain unto it ourſelves.

2. This clauſe, implies a cordial approbation of, and delight in the things, whoſe excellency is thus diſcerned. I am ſenſible that in ſpeaking of the "abounding more, and more in Love," I have in ſome meaſure anticipated this part of the ſubject: But as I there chiefly dwelt on increaſing love to God, and Man; I do not think it improper to ſubjoin ſomething here concerning increaſing Love to *things* excellent, and to add ſome thoughts on that abhorrence of evil, which is connected with it, and reſults from it.

The very nature of true religion conſiſts very much in "hating the evil, and loving the good;" in "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to "that, which is good." So that no external regularity has the leaſt degree of true religion in it, without this regulation of the judgment and affections; but is mere hypocriſy. As the Law of God peculiarly requires this; ſo the very nature of true repentance implies it; which ſprings from ſuch

ſuch an approbation of the good, that God commands, and abhorrence of the evil, which he forbids; and ſuch a conviction of the reaſonableneſs of loving and obeying our creator, and benefactor, as induces us to condemn ourſelves, to lothe, and abhor ourſelves for the vileneſs of our diſpoſition, and baſeneſs of our conduct. This ſame abhorrence of evil, and approbation of things that are excellent, forms alſo the grand means of our preſervation from returning into ſin. Without this the world will, in ſome way or other, keep it's hold, and ſin it's dominion, notwithſtanding terrors of conviction, pangs of devotion, or taſtes of tranſient joy.—Nor is there any thing wherein the "meetneſs "for the inheritance of the Saints in light" doth more conſiſt.

HOWEVER unregenerate people may amuſe themſelves with ſpeaking of the beauty of virtue, it is evident that they neither can diſcern nor reliſh the real excellency of divine things; which is manifeſt in their averſion to, and contempt of the holy amiableneſs of thoſe characters, which in all ages God hath honoured as the excellent of the earth; and their toleration of, nay the pleaſure they take in, and the Encomiums they beſtow upon actions, and perſons, which God abhorreth.

BUT all, who are born of God, both diſcern and love this ſpiritual excellency, and abhor it's oppoſite; yet in various degrees in proportion to the growth of the divine life. And 'tis ſelf-evident, that the more a man is diſpoſed to love and delight in the good, and to hate, and abhor the evil; the better he is fitted, and furniſhed for every good word, and work, and the more uniformly he will attend thereto.

WITH

WITH the increaſe of this heaven-born principle, humiliation before God will be perfecting, with all it's ſweet effects in patience, gratitude, contentment, modeſty, and meekneſs. Hatred of ſin, and love of holineſs cannot but increaſe ſelf-diſplicency, and Love of Chriſt, and a ſweet ſenſe of thankful ſurprize, on every recollection of his Love to us. None of our performances, or attainments will feed pride, if connected with this diſcernment, and abhorrence of the evil, which cleaves to us, and all we do. Watchfulneſs againſt ſin, ſelf-denial, mortification of every luſt, crucifixion to the world, and every thing in it, and a progreſſive courſe of delightful obedience, in the midſt of all poſſible changes, or oppoſitions, will certainly reſult from the increaſe of this principle: from a heart, that is thus rooted and grounded in the love of heavenly things, from a view of their excellency, and a reliſh of their ſweetneſs. Well therefore might the Apoſtle pray that "approving "the things, which are excellent," "they might "delight greatly in God's commandments."——

He next adds,

"THAT ye may be ſincere." There may be ſincerity, where there is no religion: But there can be no religion, where there is not ſincerity. Thro' prejudice, pride, love of ſin, and the world, or ſome other corrupt principle, a man may remain ſo ignorant, or his judgment be ſo perverted, that he may be full of confident perſuaſion, "that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name "of Jeſus of Nazareth," and be very *ſincere* in fighting againſt God. But tho' inſincerity be not *his* ſin, that forms no excuſe for his other ſins. He cannot be called an humble teachable

enquirer after Truth, who ſeeks it diligently and impartially, willing to embrace it, where ever he can find it, and adhere to with all it's conſequences. Nay there are ſome* "who receive not the "LOVE of the Truth; to whom for this CAUSE, "GOD ſends a ſtrong DELUSION, to believe a "LYE, that they might all be DAMNED, who "believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in "UNRIGHTEOUSNESS." Whatever ſincerity they may plead, the cauſe of their error is highly criminal, the conſequence moſt awful.

But to be ſincere in a ſcriptural ſenſe, there muſt be profeſſion of ſuch things, as the Word of God requires. Sincerity, in infidelity, profaneneſs, and perſecution of God's people is deſperate wickedneſs. But to be ſincere in profeſſed reverence to, and belief of divine Revelation, in a willingneſs to be taught and ruled of God, and in a readineſs to leave all, deny ourſelves, take up our croſs, and follow wherever the Truth leads us: To be ſincere in impartially, diligently, and humbly ſeeking it; in cordially loving, and embracing, and profeſſing it; in faithfully, and conſtantly adhering to it, and yielding obedience to it: To be ſincere in profeſſed repentance of ſin; faith in, dependance on, and love to Chriſt; love to his people, cauſe, and commandments: To be ſincere in profeſſed abhorrence of all ſin, contempt of the world, and devotedneſs to God, and his ſervice; is a great and important attainment.

To be in his ſight who ſeeth in ſecret, and ſearcheth the heart, "an Iſraelite indeed, in whom "is no guile:" To have our profeſſed Love

* 2 Theſſ. ii.

"without

"without diſſimulation:" To be as ready to lay ourſelves out in glorifying God, and doing good, as we would be thought to be: To be able without oſtentation, or heſitation to ſay, "Lord, thou "knoweſt all things, thou knoweth that I love "thee:" To be as careful to approve our ſecret conduct, and our hearts to God, as we are to approve our outward deportment to men: To dread his convicting us of hypocriſy, more than man's cenſure: To have no ſecret reſerves for any darling luſt, or againſt any ſelf-denying duty: This is a great, and excellent attainment.

FAR am I from intending perfection. The Chriſtian feels ſin dwelling, and working in him, and mixing with all he does: This is his burden, and terror at times, and oft ſends him aſhamed, and groaning to the throne of Grace, for ſuch things, as no eye ſees but that of God. But he allows not any ſin; wants not to indent for ſparing any, but would have all mortified; and no more *habitually allows* envy, malice, pride, or luſt to lodge quietly as a welcome gueſt in his heart, than he indulges them in his life.

IN this ſincerity St. Paul rejoiced under all the calumnies, with which he was aſperſed.—"Our "rejoicing is this, even the teſtimony of our "conſcience, that in ſimplicity and *godly ſincerity*, "not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by the Grace of "God, we have had our converſation in the "world." Without ſuch inward integrity, no man can be a true Chriſtian; but it gathers ſtrength, and gains aſcendancy with increaſing Grace: and the true Chriſtian, as his ſpiritual underſtanding is improved, diſcovers much in his conduct, and converſation not conſiſtent with it,

which he is alſo careful to rectify. For the ſame things, which were no impeachment of his ſincerity formerly, would prove him a hypocrite, if he perſiſted in them, when "more fully inſtructed "in the ways of the Lord."

THE Philippians were already ſincere in the Apoſtle's judgment; but he prays, that the principle might more prevail in their hearts, and more exactly regulate all their profeſſions towards God, and Man; that they might in word and deed in every reſpect be more pure from every appearance of hypocriſy, or inſincerity. Thus would I pray for myſelf and you; thus I hope you pray for yourſelves, for each other, and for me; and daily ſtudy to act accordingly.

BUT the word originally ſignifies *unmixed:* And ſome have thought that it is uſed in oppoſition to the too common attempt of ſerving God, and Mammon; and of enjoying both the pleaſures of the world, and of religion; in direct defiance of Chriſt's moſt ſolemn declaration, that it cannot be done. When a man ſeems religious in the place of worſhip, on the Lord's day, and in ſome companies: But appears deſtitute of it in other places, on other occaſions, and among other companions: When his religion enters not into his cloſet, his family, his ſhop, his converſation: When his tempers, affections, dealings, and purſuits are uninfluenced by it: When he makes one as regularly at the places of diſſipation, as at thoſe of devotion, and is religious only by halves, or by fits, and ſtarts: This is a very melancholy, tho' a very common mixture.——

OPPOSITE to this is the man, who is all of a piece; the ſame in all places, and companies; acting

acting habitually under this impreſſion, "thou God "ſeeſt me;" who "is in the fear of the Lord all "the day long:" Who is influenced in his moſt ordinary employment by the higheſt principles: Who doing all "heartily, as unto the Lord, and "not unto men," according to the rule of his word, in ſubmiſſion to his providence, from love to his name, with an eye to his acceptance, and a regard to his glory; and "having all ſanctified by "the word of God, and prayer," ſerves God in his ſhop, in his manual labour, as a hired ſervant, in every relation, nay in every refreſhment of life; for "whether he eats, or drinks, or whatever he "does, he aims to do all to the glory of God."

RELIGION is his buſineſs, his pleaſure, and his intereſt; and by giving every part it's proper place, and proportioning one thing with, and arranging it in ſubſerviency to another, he makes every thing a part of religion.

I ſay not, that any man completely anſwers this deſcription: but ſomething of this the true Chriſtian has, and more he aims at: and it certainly comes within the ſpirit of the Apoſtle's prayer: and alſo coinſides with the deſire of my heart for you, my Brethren, that you may have more, and more of it.

THE Apoſtle adds, "That you may be without "offence until the day of Chriſt."

THE day of judgment ſhould ever be before our eyes, and is therefore in Scripture continually adverted to:* Tho' 'tis plain, that it was not thereby meant, that it was near at hand. However to each of us "the judge ſtandeth at the door;"

* 2 Theſſ. ii.

the

the day of death will tranſmit us to judgment, and fix the deciſion of that ſolemn day. If preſerved from offence 'till the day of death, we ſhall 'till the day of Chriſt.

But what is it to "be without offence?" Some are offended at the Goſpel, and make no profeſſion; ſome profeſs, and continue for a while, "but "by and by are offended." If we ſhould ſuppoſe the Apoſtle intimates to the Philippians, that tho' he was very confident of them, yet he would have them diffident of themſelves, it would not confine the meaning to either of theſe caſes.

Only Judas apoſtatized from Chriſt, but all the Apoſtles "were offended becauſe of him," in that awful hour, when he was betrayed. Many, who have not fallen away, have given great cauſe to the enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme, and been the occaſion of hardening multitudes in infidelity and hypocriſy. And, however God, in his unſearchable counſels, may for wiſe and holy purpoſes permit and over-rule ſuch things: yet not his ſecret purpoſe, but his commandment of loving all men as ourſelves, is the rule of our conduct. And ſurely a Chriſtian, tho' aſſured of his own ſalvation, would leave the world with tears and groans, upon reflecting, that thro' his miſconduct, ſome had been hardened, and others deceived: The name of God blaſphemed, his Goſpel ridiculed, his enemies exulting, and his friends overwhelmed with ſorrow, and diſcouragement.

Our way to Heaven is beſet with ſnares, and interſperſed with many ſtumbling blocks, placed there by Satan, wicked men, hypocrites, apoſtates, and inconſiſtent profeſſors. And tho' watchfulneſs, and circumſpection are our duty, yet except the

Lord

Lord keep us, we ſhall watch in vain. We have need to pray continually, "Hold thou me up, "and I ſhall be ſafe:" We have need to be helped by the prayers of others, and to help others with our prayers: We have need to fear falling over the ſtumbling blocks already in the way; we have need to fear, leſt by imbibing and propagating error, by indiſcretion, inconſiſtency, or appearance of evil, we ſhould increaſe the number, and give occaſion for the falls of others.

NOTHING ſure can be more deſirable to an heir of Salvation, than to paſs the time of his ſojourning here with ſuch cautions fear, and humble circumſpection, as to bring no reproach on the Goſpel: and at laſt to leave a fair character behind him, and a teſtimony in the conſciences of all around him, that his belief of the doctrines of the Goſpel influenced him to univerſal conſcientiouſneſs, and formed his character excellent and uſeful. This is finally "by well doing to put to ſilence "the ignorance of fooliſh men:" It gives a concluding ratification to every teſtimony a man has born for Chriſt: and being dead, he will yet ſpeak to the conſciences of thoſe, who in his life time converſed with him.

THAT this ſhould form one clauſe of this excellent prayer, we cannot wonder; for ſure it forms a leading part of every Chriſtian's daily prayers for himſelf, and for all, that name the name of Chriſt: Surely every one, who loves the Lord, and his people, cauſe and truth, muſt prefer death with credit and comfort, to the moſt proſperous life, connected with bringing diſhonour upon the Goſpel.

THE

THE Apoſtle concludes, "That ye may be filled "with the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are "by Jeſus Chriſt unto the glory, and praiſe "of God."

ALL the care, pains, and expence which the Gardener employs, in planting, grafting, pruning, and tending the tree, is for the ſake of the fruit; and neither the ſtatelineſs of it's growth, the redundancy of it's foliage, or the beauty of it's bloſſoms, will prevent his diſappointment, if it be unfruitful. Thus the whole contrivance, purchaſe, and revelation of Redemption; the preached Goſpel, and and inſtituted ordinances, are all intended to make us fruitful; and if this end be not anſwered, all the labour is loſt:* "What could have been done "more to my vineyard, that I have not done in "it? wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring "forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" Nay the work of the Spirit of God in illuminating convincing, and comforting the ſoul, is all ſubordinate to it's becoming fruitful; nor is any kind of experience, knowledge, faith, joy, or confidence, genuine, which hath not it's effect in fruitfulneſs. "Every tree that bringeth not forth "good fruit is hewn down and caſt into the "fire."

WHATEVER, in a Believer's conduct, has a real tendency to promote the glory of God, the credit and ſpread of the Goſpel, the peace and purity of the Church, or the converſion of ſinners from their evil ways: Whatever tends to diminiſh the total ſum of ignorance, wickedneſs and miſery; or to increaſe that of true knowledge, wiſdom,

* Iſaiah v.

holineſs,

holineſs, and felicity; or in any way to do real good to mankind in their ſpiritual, or temporal concerns, is ſubſtantial fruit: All elſe is mere leaves, and bloſſoms.

An upright, faithful, harmleſs, blameleſs, benevolent, peaceable, forgiving, kind, pure, and holy converſation: A chearful, thankful, ſubmiſſive ſpirit; a reverential attention to God's ordinances, and commandments; a due fulfilment of relative duties; and an habitual moderation reſpecting the intereſts, pleaſures, and purſuits of life, have in all caſes this tendency. To this add the improvement of the talents committed ſeverally to our ſtewardſhip: as authority, influence, abilities, learning, riches, and other advantages, which our ſituation affords us of doing good; with all thoſe pious, and charitable actions, which, in various ways, we are thereby enabled to perform. Connect therewith boldneſs, and conſtancy in profeſſing; and patience, chearfulneſs, and meekneſs in ſuffering for the truth; and you have ſome general outlines of Chriſtian fruitfulneſs.

Except a man in ſome degree bring forth theſe fruits of righteouſneſs, he is no real Chriſtian; but all real Chriſtians are not alike fruitful. "The "good ground" (according to another parable) "brought forth fruit, ſome thirty, ſome ſixty, and "ſome an hundred fold." Tho' the Apoſtle rejoiced in, and was thankful for an inferior fruitfulneſs, yet he prayed, "that they might be *filled* "with the fruits of righteouſneſs:" That is, produce fruits of every kind, in a degree fully proportioned to their ability, and opportunity; no talent being abuſed, or buried, no occaſion ſlipped, no duty omitted, nor any thing left unattempted,

whereby God might be glorified, and men benefitted. We cannot without pride think we are perfect; nor can we without ſin ceaſe to pray for, and follow after perfection.

PROFESSORS, like fruit trees, too often muſt be examined carefully, in order to decide, whether there be any fruit, or no: But, unlike the caſe of fruit-trees, it is impoſſible for us certainly to determine. The Apoſtle was not ſatisfied with ſuch ambiguous characters: He wiſhed to ſee "the trees of righteouſneſs, the planting of the "Lord," like thoſe fruit-trees, which excite the attention and admiration of every paſſenger, who obſerves how every branch is loaded with fruit.

BUT to what end are we to be thus fruitful? Not to juſtify our perſons, nor to recommend ourſelves to God, nor to gain the admiration, or applauſe of others. Theſe are motives which Chriſtianity allows not: The Apoſtle points out very different ends, when he ſays, "Which thro' "Jeſus Chriſt, are to the glory and praiſe of God:" He ſtamps this *practical* ſubject *evangelically*, as in other places he ſtamps *doctrinal* ſubjects *practically*, thus aſcertaining each to be ſterling. Such imperfect fruits of righteouſneſs, as our's at beſt are, ſo far from recommending us to God, could not themſelves be acceptable to him, were they not preſented in the name, and ſprinkled, as it were, with the blood of Jeſus. But even theſe, being produced from our *fallen nature*, by the influences of his Spirit, and the efficacy of his truth; in conſequence of the Redemption of his Son, and being preſented in the name of Chriſt, they are in the higheſt degree acceptable and honourable to God; "With ſuch ſacrifices God

"is

"is well pleaſed;" "for hereby is he glorified, "when we bring forth *much fruit.*"

THIS however leads us to the laſt thing propoſed.

IV. To enquire into the reaſons, which, we may ſuppoſe, induced the Apoſtle to pray eſpecially for theſe things.

IT is obſervable that there is no petition either for temporal proſperity, deliverance from perſecution, or even for ſpiritual conſolation. Indeed temporal proſperity is of ſo ambiguous a nature, that no wiſe man can unreſervedly pray for it, either for himſelf, or others indiſcriminately; tho' St. John wiſhes his "beloved Gaius may be in "health, and proſper, even as his ſoul proſ-"pered;" A ſingular example! Doubtleſs the Apoſtle did pray, that they might be delivered from, and profited by all "the tribulations, and "perſecutions, which they endured;" and "that "their hearts might be comforted being knit "together in Love." But he here only mentions the chief things, which eſpecially he deſired for them, as comprehenſive of the reſt, or ſufficient without them.—— I obſerve therefore,

1. THAT the Apoſtle prayed for theſe things, in order to their being filled with comfort. Without holineſs (which eſpecially this prayer reſpects) there can be no comfort, or only falſe comfort. To ſeek, or pray for comfort therefore, except as ſpringing from, and connected with ſanctification, is inverting the order of things, and muſt be unavailing; without a man can be ſatisfied with the joy of the hypocrite, or ſtony ground hearer. A ſelfiſh miſtake of this kind, not only cauſes many

"to rejoice in a thing of nought," but prevents the comfort of many upright Chriſtians.

If a man be ſick, 'tis very abſurd to attempt chearing his ſpirits by ſtrong cordials, when they encreaſe, inſtead of abating his diſorder: The exhileration is ſhort lived, and of fatal tendency. When proper medicines have removed the malady, returning health alone will ſupply more pleaſing ſenſations. Sin is the diſeaſe of the ſoul; when pride, malice, luſt, covetouſneſs, or any other ſinful diſpoſition prevails, you cannot ſafely comfort a man by any privileges, or promiſes of the Goſpel. They can have no durable effect, and are of hurtful tendency; that alone is ſafe and profitable, which tends to remove the diſorder. But when a humble, meek, loving, holy, and heavenly ſpirit prevails: when knowledge, love, ſubmiſſion, obedience, diffuſe their influence, ſubjugating every luſt, and moderating every other attachment; the man feels himſelf happy of courſe. And the cordials of the Goſpel, are chiefly intended for thoſe engaged in ſharp conflict, hard ſervice, and heavy trials.

Moreover our genuine comforts ſpring from the Spirit of God, opening to us the treaſures of redeeming Love, applying to the conſcience the blood of ſprinkling, aſſuring us of the Love of God to us, exciting love, and gratitude to him, and giving us a lively hope, and ſweet earneſts of eternal glory. But all kind of ſin, even in the tempers, and affections, grieves, and quenches the ſpirit, and interrupts our comfort; 'till in renewed exerciſes of repentance, and faith, our peace be reſtored. In proportion therefore as we aſk and receive the things, we have diſcourſed of, we ſhall in general have conſolation; a peace of God, which

which paſſeth underſtanding; or a joy unſpeakable, and glorious.*

I truſt, my Brethren, I value theſe conſolations more than all manner of riches, or worldly pleaſures; and alſo long that you may enjoy them from day to day. But I neither expect, nor *allow* the deſire of our ſo doing, except in proportion to increaſing Grace, and abounding fruitfulneſs. Upon the moſt mature deliberation, I pray God, that when we grow careleſs, lukewarm, or worldly, the loſs of wonted comforts may chaſtiſe our folly. Nay, if the only wiſe God ſees that the withholding of comfort will increaſe holineſs, I beg of him that we may rather be ſanctified, and not comforted, than comforted, and not ſanctified. Senſible comfort is in itſelf a tranſient thing, but increaſing holineſs has influence upon eternity; Beſides the glory, which redounds to God, and the uſe it is of to others.

God grant we may in this ſenſe "approve the "things, that are moſt excellent," and ſeek *firſt* holineſs; then aſſuredly conſolation will not be with-held: By the ſame rule, that to them, who ſeek *firſt* the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, all other things will be added: But they, who invert the order loſe both.

2. I ſuppoſe the Apoſtle *eſpecially* meant in this prayer, that God might be glorified in them, and by them.

Every one who, in the days of our Saviour, ſaw the blind, that had received ſight; the maimed, who were made whole; the lame, who leaped, and walked; and the dead, who had been raiſed; would

* See Chap. iv. 6. 9.

have

have cauſe to ſay, "See what Jeſus of Nazareth "hath wrought! How wonderful his power! How "ready his love! How great, and beneficent his "miracles!" The perſons themſelves, would not only concur in this, but be ready to ſay to all around them, "He, whom they deſpiſe, and ſeek "to put to death, reſtored my limbs, my under-"ſtanding, my life!" Thus would he be glorified in them, and by them.

When they, who profeſs the doctrine of Chriſt, and avouch him to be their God, and Saviour, ſhew, in a manner equally inconteſtable, that their evil tempers are ſanctified, their luſts and paſſions mortified, their contracted hearts enlarged, and their characters, and conduct formed pure, and holy; they conſtrain, all who before knew, them to notice, and admire the change, and to enquire into the cauſe of it: What hath transformed the briar into a myrtle, the lion into a lamb, the ſwine into a ſheep? Whilſt they, by profeſſing faith in Chriſt, give him all the glory, the power and tendency of the Goſpel, and the excellency of the fruits, which it produces, are manifeſted. Thus Jeſus would be glorified in them and by them, and their fruitfulneſs would be thro' him, to the praiſe, and glory of God: Iniquity muſt ſtop it's mouth, and infidelity would ſtand confuted.

"Wo be to the world becauſe of *offences:*" Hypocrites and Apoſtates muſt needs cauſe many of them: and the beſt are not without perceivable infirmities. We ought therefore the more to pray for ourſelves and each other, that God having "ſet us apart for himſelf," "we may be to him, "for a name and a praiſe," and "make thoſe "aſhamed,

"aſhamed, who would falſely accuſe our good "converſation in Chriſt."

3. ANOTHER reaſon reſults from this: Namely that evangelical religion may appear *reſpectable* even in the eſtimation of the world. "That ye may "*adorn* the doctrine." Nothing can add to the glory, and beauty of divine Truth in itſelf; but that glory and beauty can only be "ſpiritually "diſcerned;" to the world it appears fooliſhneſs, and many are confirmed in their proud contempt of it by the diviſions, and miſconduct of thoſe, who profeſs it. But in the chriſtian temper and converſation there is an excellency, they are not hardy enough to deny, and they feel the benefit of it ſenſibly. In this we muſt adorn it in their eyes.

ONE noiſy, imprudent, inconſiſtent profeſſor of evangelical Truth, who is ignorant or negligent of the duties, which his place and ſtation require, and is guilty of evidently wrong things, will expoſe the doctrines to the ſcorn, hatred, and reproach of the whole family, in which he reſides. One ſuch Chriſtian, as hath been deſcribed, notwithſtanding infirmities, and incidental failures, will have a teſtimony in the conſciences, win upon the hearts, ſoften the prejudices, and ſilence the reproaches and ſcoffs of a whole family; and in like manner, and proportion in villages, towns, and cities.—— Let a hint ſuffice: 'Tis too evident that in many places, numbers of ſuperficial, and vain talkers about the more offenſive doctrines of the Goſpel, getting into families, and miſbehaving themſelves, bring a wideſpread reproach upon the Truth, and furniſh thouſands with one *plauſible* objection to it. But in other places, the good behaviour of the profeſſors, who walk wiſely and circumſpectly towards them

them, that are without, and are careful to avoid all appearance of evil, has almoſt put oppoſition itſelf to ſhame and ſilence.

4. In conſequence of this, the Apoſtle may be ſuppoſed, to have reſpect to the ſpread of the Goſpel, in this prayer. All, who love the Goſpel, wiſh to ſpread it, but *many* attempt this in a wrong manner. They think that it is to be done, by arguing with every body about the doctrines; or that right or wrong they muſt become preachers. 'Tis good, when called to it, to contend earneſtly for the Truth: And the Lord increaſe an hundred fold the number of faithful Miniſters, how many ſo ever they be. But perhaps, if we had leſs diſputing; and even leſs preaching in ſome places, and of ſome kinds; and more of thoſe, who preach to all around them, in the ſilent energy of a holy life, we ſhould ſhortly have a much wider ſpread of true Chriſtianity. Every word, which ſuch perſons drop, whether of ſerious reproof, or exhortation, or in ordinary converſation: Every perſuaſion to go to hear a ſermon, or read a book; in ſhort every thing will have weight, and in ſome inſtances ſucceſs. Whilſt, "Phyſician heal thy-"ſelf," is a ſufficient anſwer to the mere profeſſor, however zealous.——

And indeed I am perſuaded that the meaneſt Miniſter, who preaches the Truth, and lives conſiſtent with it, and is ſurrounded by a few vouchers *in their lives* for the holy tendency of his doctrine, will be more ſubſtantially, and durably uſeful; than the moſt able ſpeaker, who is either looſe in his own conduct, or ſurrounded with profeſſors, who are ſo.

Some-

Sometimes God revives religion by numerous converſions: But even theſe revivals are ſhort lived, and ſoon come to nothing, if holineſs ſhine not in the lives of the profeſſors. More generally the cauſe of God ſpreads like the leaven, and grows like the grain of muſtard ſeed; inſenſibly from ſmall beginnings to ſomewhat conſiderable. Where 'tis of a right ſtamp, it kindles from heart to heart, in families, and neighbourhoods; and one and another, are won over, even without the word, by the good converſation of relations, and friends, whilſt they behold their conſiſtent conduct, and reap themſelves the fruit of it. I truſt we join in prayers that it may be ſo more and more in our neighbourhoods: I truſt you have been told the right method of ſeeking to attain the object of theſe prayers: "Let your light ſhine before men, that "they may ſee your good works, and glorify your "Father, which is in heaven:" And be ſure the cauſe will proſper.

5. Probably the Apoſtle had a view, not only, to the ſpread of the Goſpel, but to it's deſcending to their poſterity.

Holy men of God have always had ſuch regard to the intereſts of religion in ſucceeding ages, as to be moſt zealous, and diligent, juſt before they left the world. Thus Moſes, Joſhua, David, Paul, and others had that mind in them; which alſo was in Chriſt Jeſus. Eſpecially does the true Chriſtian long that his children, and children's children, and thoſe of his relatives, and friends, may from generation to generation be the ſupports, and ornaments of the Goſpel. In condeſcenſion to this deſire are ſo many aſſurances of the Covenant, made with us, being for the good "of our

"children after us." But ſuch Chriſtians alone as have been deſcribed, can reaſonably expect this bleſſing. Their example and converſation, their inſtructions, and warnings; their living and dying teſtimony for God, and the reputation they acquire after death, however ſlighted in their life time, ſpeak powerfully to the conſcience in behalf of religion, after they are gone. Having honoured God in their lives, he will honour them in anſwering their prayers: And even if they leave their children, or any of them unconverted, they may have in death a peaceful hope, that their requeſts ſhall ſtill be granted, and their poſterity conſequently bleſſed.

In general however 'tis certain, that where ever Chriſtianity of this ſort is once planted, it will not eaſily, nor ſpeedily be eradicated; and this fruit produced, will remain in it's effects from generation to generation: and indeed in one reſpect or other, to the end of time, yea thro' eternity.

6. The Apoſtle might have reſpect to their having an aſſured hope, and ſtrong conſolation in a dying hour. Death is in it's nature, it's original, and it's conſequences, the king of terrors: And tho' he come diſarmed of his ſting to the true Believer; yet nature ſo recoils, and faith and hope are oft ſo wavering, that many Chriſtians look forward to the ſolemn ſcene, with much anxiety. And indeed, if we were to have but one day of ſpiritual comfort in our lives, one would wiſh to reſerve that cordial for this laſt conflict. But a looſe, carnal, and ſlothful conduct, even if groſſer ſins are eſcaped, certainly threatens diſtreſs to the Chriſtian's Death-bed. On the other hand, if our hopes are evangelical, "our converſation "as "becometh

" becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt," and by diligence in our proper work, we are habitually and actually always ready, we may chearfully caſt that care alſo upon the Lord, and truſt that " our latter end " ſhall aſſuredly be peace."

Laſtly. The Apoſtle evidently refers to his joyful meeting them in judgment. I ſhall only quote and adopt his words, " Among whom ſhine " ye, as lights in the world; that I may rejoice in " the day of Chriſt, that I have not run in vain, " neither laboured in vain."

To conclude the whole. We muſt all appear before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt, to give an account of every part of our conduct; eſpecially the Miniſter of his miniſtry, and the people of their profiting by it. Then the juſtification of the faithful Miniſter, will fix and aggravate the condemnation of Unbelievers. Let us then prepare thus to meet our God: And the Lord grant we may then give up our account with joy.

If what hath been diſcourſed be Chriſtianity reduced to practice, the genuine tendency of evangelical principles truly received, what holy doctrines are they! What an excellent religion is it! But alas how rarely thus exemplified!—How baſe muſt they be who oppoſe, inſult and reproach it, for the faults of thoſe, who profeſs it! How inexcuſable they, who give them ſuch occaſion! How falſe to accuſe this doctrine of leſſening our obligation to holineſs, or ſuperſeding the neceſſity of good works, which ſerve ſo many noble purpoſes, tho' they cannot have any ſhare in a *ſinner's* juſtification! And how careful ſhould we be by our lives to confute and ſilence ſuch ſlanders. Having ſuch motives, and encouragements, and ſuch

ſuch a fountain of Grace to draw from; let us this day humble ourſelves before God, that we have been no more fruitful; and coming for, and depending on the promiſed aſſiſtance of the Spirit of Chriſt, let us aim henceforward to be more fruitful in, and zealous of good works.

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